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A Study in Language and Gender

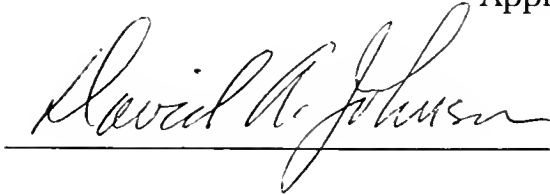
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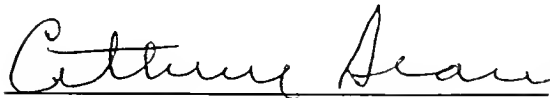
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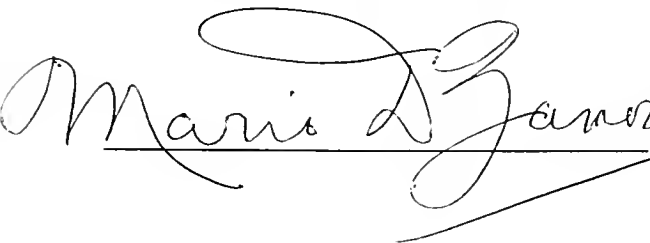
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Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking
and prying with purpose. It is a seeking that he
who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the
world and they that dwell therein.

- Zora Neale Hurston -

Introduction

Humans became interested in differences between the sexes as soon as they realized that there were two sexes. Their interest led them to observe that men and women often master and fulfill different roles in society. When technology reached an appropriate level, they discovered that there were X and Y chromosomes and hormones unique to each sex. Humans had cultural and biological data to base their ideas about the sexes upon, and their intrigue with the topic grew. They began to ask questions. Should they eliminate the differences or revel in them? Did the differences come from biology or culture, or a combination of the two? How do the differences affect the average person?

Study on gender diversity has reached the level where specific differences are focused upon, and one of the key topics is gender specific language. Language is an excellent key to studying not only the individual but the culture as well. Both anthropologists and psychologists use language as an indicator of less obvious mental and cultural phenomena.

Theorists, such as Lakoff (1975) and Tannen (1990), believe men and women not only speak different languages but also use language for different purposes. Ideas about the origin of these linguistic differences range from evolution to enculturation. Empirical research has seldom supported the presence of these differences. The purpose of the research outlined here was to produce empirical support for the idea of gender diverse speech, rather than relying on the evidence of anecdotes and personal observations.

Drawing directly upon the ideas of Robin Lakoff (1975), I

hypothesized that men use more action words than do women. While Lakoff provided little more than observational evidence for the controversial ideas in her book, her ideas were stimulating, and I tested the ideas she gave me. In this paper, I present the results of research designed to examine whether men use more action words than women and present possible reasons for the presence of this phenomenon in particular situations.

I first review the literature and then discuss my own research, showing how it fits into the schemas proposed by earlier researchers. I explore explanations for the data I obtained and postulate about the effects of gender diverse speech on society. I conclude with suggestions for future research.

Review of Literature

Scholars have examined the relationship between language and gender for the past fifty years. Margaret Mead was among the first anthropologists to explore this area, and it is to her that most researchers first look. Like Whorf (1942, in Carroll, 1956) and Levi-Strauss (1958, in Hymes, 1964), Mead believed that language was a clear differentiating factor between cultures, and that language was a tool that could be used to study gender differences. "[The anthropologist] asks, fundamentally, not what this language is, but how this language has varied within the framework of English. So in the behaviour of boys and girls, of men and women. (Mead, 1967: 44)" Mead was also one of the first anthropologists to apply psychology to cultural study, examining the relationship between the individual and society from a psychological point of view.

In *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1973), Mead dealt with the issue of female development using empirical methods common in participant observation to obtain her data. In her "check list used in investigation of each girl's experience," she included a factor she called the index of knowledge of the "courtesy language," which included courtesy phrases for use when passing in front of someone and words used in deference to the chief of the group. Mead found that women learned a polite and gentle language that was quite different from that used by men. Mead proposed an "interplay between individual endowment and cultural style (Mead, 1973: xi)" as the formulating factors in gender development. She was forward thinking in her acceptance of both nature and nurture as

pieces in the puzzle of gender specification. Much of the later research in gender studies was rooted in Mead's early work. Her influence was widespread, but was particularly important to gender research. In contrast to the male anthropologist who studied secret male rituals, her early work viewed women in other cultures from a female perspective and stimulated ethnographers to study the daily life of both sexes. Articulating the differences in the education of Samoan girls and boys, Mead showed that men and women not only have different roles in culture, they also shape the culture in differing ways. Mead argued that only through study could scientists understand a culture and be able to affect change. "The social scientist, working with an emerging awareness that if pursued will surely alter the shape of our world, carries a heavy load of obligation. When the social scientist says understanding will make men freer to shape their own destiny, he claims not only that understanding itself is good, but also that he can offer some of that understanding, or at least the way to attain it. (Mead, 1967: 431)"

This understanding has been increasingly sought by anthropologists since Mead's time. There are hundreds of ethnographies available, but few deal specifically with aspects of gender. It is often difficult for a male anthropologist to grasp the woman's point of view, and vice versa. As more women have entered anthropology, there is a greater focus on women as an integral part of the complete cultural picture.

In my investigation of language and gender, I focused on five ethnographies that point clearly to gender differences. The cultures studied were the Isthmus Zapotecs in Mexico (Chiñas, 1973), the Mundurucu in Brazil (Murphey & Murphey, 1974), modern Japanese

(Norbeck, 1965), the Iatmul in New Guinea (Bateson, 1986), and Cajuns in Louisiana (Esman, 1985). I chose these five societies because they represent not only geographic diversity, but diverse lifestyles and beliefs as well, extending from the colonial New Guinean culture of 1936, to modern industrialized, technological societies found in Japan and the United States.

While few of the ethnographies' authors spoke directly to the issue of language, all discussed gender differences found within each culture, and the origins of these variations. These cultures represent in part the range of sex roles found among humanity. Most of the authors were careful to say that what they found in their studies did not necessarily apply to all other cultures. With this relativism in mind, I utilize their ethnographic data and hypotheses to compare the differences between gender roles found in these societies. All of the authors found striking differences in the definitions, perceptions, and behaviors of the sexes, and all found firm divisional lines with regards to male and female roles. A summary of the findings follows.

In *The Isthmus Zapotecs: Women's Roles in Cultural Context* Chiñas (1973) explored social relations at all levels, including sex roles in ritual and non-ritual settings and the division of labor in relation to the subsistence base. Chiñas pointed out that sex roles are both nonformal and formal, and that nonformal roles can be both overt and covert. Chiñas placed language under nonformal roles, and emphasized that these nonformal roles were integral to the maintenance of the social structure. "...[I]t is the fact of sex rather than kinship which makes such roles possible, the fact that women operate in a social universe separate from men and therefore are privy to information which men either do not

or may not circulate among themselves, and the fact that certain types of movement and courses of action are open only to women. (1973: 109)"

Chiñas believed that men and women lived in separate worlds. While I agree with most of her thesis, I disagree on this point. Men and women, by virtue of necessity, live together, and function in the world together. While there are undoubtedly times when men and women are excluded from one another, such as male initiation or child birth, they continue to interact, and it is in these interactional patterns that I seek differentiation. The men and women in a given culture share the same environment; they simply perceive it in different ways, and these varying perceptions affect how they interact. Chiñas in her introduction, wrote, "One of the first rules of logic teaches us that comparing things which are dissimilar leads to invalid conclusions. But where sex roles are concerned, the comparisons are too often implicit as are the assumptions derived from them. Perhaps we have overlooked the 'action' of women's roles in many cultures because that action is qualitatively different from that associated with male roles. (1973: 2)" I understood her view, but I believe that these "qualitative" differences are not the key. The key to understanding gender diversity, as Bem (1974, 1981) notes, is in looking at the diversity on a continuum, not as unequivocally different facts. Bem thought that masculinity and femininity, along with androgyny, was best thought of as a continuum. Chiñas, in contrast, tried to categorize factors which simply did not lend themselves to such a rigid structure. Continua would, of course, vary as a function of each society.

Murphey and Murphey's (1974) *Women of the Forest* discussed the Mundurucú of Brazil, a society in which women played the most

important cultural roles, those meeting basic societal needs, yet were given no recognition for this and were still considered inferior to men. The authors described a "battle of the sexes," in which each sex tried to establish power and dominance in various areas. The women were the undisputed heads of the household, but their power was viewed as given to them by the men. The men, who never fully relinquished power to the women, were at all levels the acknowledged leaders. The dichotomy between real and official power led to resentment and fear on the part of both sexes. Both sexes used compensatory measures to make up for perceived injustices, and these methods further widened the gap between men and women. The men were always fearful that the women would join together and take over, and the women were constantly complaining about their lack of authority. The Murpheys concluded that such a phenomenon, while it was more striking in a simpler, smaller context, was found as well in the industrialized Western world. "We [anthropologists] are confronting the question of the universality of the cultural superiority of the male without a set of absolute standards of what constitutes superiority. The problem of hierarchy... becomes muddled and opaque in the complex and emotion-laden tie - or breach - between the sexes... As in all things, the first step toward wisdom is the awareness that we really do not know what we are talking about. (1974: 209)"

I do not agree with such sweeping generalizations across cultures, but do agree that the men and women of the Mundurucú, and perhaps of other cultures as well, were at cross-purposes; they simply did not speak the same language, and often failed to understand each other. The

Murpheys believed this miscommunication was common to gender relations in all cultures. They concluded, with a strong ethnographic data base, that linguistic complexity was not required for mutual misunderstanding. The Mundurucú were not a complex society, and the Murpheys showed that they suffered from many of the same communicational problems of which North American couples complain. The Murpheys wanted to generalize, but they were simply looking at the first step in the continuum, a technologically simple people still managing to create confusion and tension between the sexes.

Esman's (1985) *Henderson, Louisiana* was an account the Cajun culture of Louisiana. Esman stated that among these Cajuns, "Men and women, especially if they are married, are not expected to be friends. Many Henderson residents have difficulty understanding the notion of male-female nonsexual friendship. Because in most cases men and women have different goals and concerns, they share few interests and there is little common ground for friendship. (1985: 49)" Esman pointed out how separate were the roles men and women played in this society. Men were more often gone from home for extended periods, while women were involved in school and church activities, which focused on home and children.

In a passage strikingly relevant to this discussion, Esman examined the relationship between language and gender, noting that the men retained and used more of the French language than did the women, and French was used more often with other men than with women or children. "Other observers of the area have noted that while young women who speak French are seen as unsophisticated and

undesirable, their male counterparts may deliberately attempt to learn more French as a kind of male code language when they take a first job. (1985: 52)" Esman also said that it was the women who passed the larger American culture to the children, and primarily the men who offered the rougher French/Cajun parts of enculturation. Esman did not say whether the boys learned more from their fathers while the girls learned more from their mothers. It would fit the pattern described by Esman if the boys strongly adopted the Cajun culture, separating them further from the culture learned by the girls.

Esman's discussion correlated well with the work of the Murpheys, showing the amount of tension between the sexes and how this discord is seldom communicated within the society. She did not apply this cross-culturally, but she pointed out that in human history, it has most often been the men who leave on hunting raids and the women who remain at home and take care of the children and the elderly. She wrote that sex roles were taught from birth, and that the unconnected paths the sexes were put on created a "barrier" that was seldom bridged, even in adulthood. "From childhood, girls are raised to be interested in the home, to be 'pretty,' and to act 'like a little lady.' In contrast, boys wear overalls and sneakers and are expected to get dirty when they play. It is understood that 'boys will be boys,' and to expect a boy to act like an adult is to rob him of his freedom... It is only after retirement that men's and women's lives begin to converge. (1985: 48-51)"

Norbeck (1965), in *Changing Japan*, discussed the modern Japanese culture, a society that has traditionally held the belief that the wife should be submissive and the husband dominant. Women were

treated as little more than slaves in the Japan of the past. Norbeck demonstrated that remnants of the past still existed and continued to affect the lives of modern Japanese men and women. Jiro and Aki were a typical married couple of the mid-nineteen sixties. Jiro, as the youngest son in his family, was raised lavishly, with an abundance of attention and material goods. Aki was raised happily and spent much time being instructed in the "social graces." Both partners were well educated and came from middle-class homes. Jiro and Aki's marriage was arranged by their families and their wedding ceremony was traditional. Concerning the beginning of their married life together, Norbeck wrote, "Both were glad the honeymoon was over, but neither felt dissatisfaction with the other. The pattern of their relationship was set. Aki would guide when guidance was needed and otherwise would follow. For his part, Jiro returned to Osaka with both affection and admiration for his wife. (1965: 73)" It was evident the traditional boundaries surrounding the sexes still applied to the Japanese culture. Norbeck pointed out the submissive role that women filled in Japanese society and indicated that it was more than simply a cultural norm. It affected every aspect of life. Norbeck frequently made the point that the complementary roles of male and female helped to hold together the traditional Japanese culture. The men had to work on fishing boats and the women were responsible for maintaining the home. Norbeck noted that many of the traditional roles had changed as modernization reached Japan, but he did not give any examples of this change. It was apparent that Jiro and Aki understood each other no better than did a couple in the Mundurucú. "Aki has many plans for the future of which her husband is not yet completely aware, although she has not really kept them secret. (1965: 58)" Norbeck

never said why Jiro did not know of his wife's ambitions, but it seemed it was because they simply did not communicate, something which was the fault of neither husband nor wife. If Japanese women are generally less forceful than men, it is logical to imply that their language is less aggressive and more gentle.

In *Naven*, Gregory Bateson reported his research on the Iatmul on the Sepik River in New Guinea. He described in detail the Naven ceremony in which both men and women dressed and behaved in a caricature of the opposite sex. These transvestitic ceremonies, ranging from very short and simple to long and elaborate, were used to honor an individual's *laua*, a younger clan member. When the *laua* accomplished a great feat, such as spearing a fish or carving a canoe, he/she was honored by having the Naven performed. Bateson described in detail the occasions upon which this was performed, and they invariably occurred when a child had done something gender specific for the first time. A boy was honored when he killed his first enemy, a girl when she made her first fishing net.

Bateson used these ceremonies as examples to support his theory of schismogenesis, which he applied not only to cultural events, but later to psychological ones as well. He defined schismogenesis as "a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behaviour resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals. (1986: 175)" Bateson used schismogenesis to explain why men and women grew to be so different. He explained it in terms of symmetry. The more feminine a woman acted, the more masculine a man acted in response. The responsive roles increased along symmetrical paths. Bateson saw a divergence in

behavior, cognition, and emotion, and thought schismogenesis explained not only the transvestism of the Iatmul during Naven, but the actions of males and females in all cultures. Bateson said this process was not one of simple enculturated learning, but one of continued change and refinement. He discussed in detail the combination of inherited and cultural factors which shaped the individual.

Bateson uses behavioral theory, relying upon stimulus and response, to help explain cultural and individual variation. It explains why men and women use different languages, especially when with a member of the opposite sex. They simply respond to the stimulus of another's response. In a similar way, the Cajuns encouraged the little girls to be more frilly and grown-up, while the boys were allowed to get dirtier and behave in a less mature manner. According to Bateson, this disparity will continue throughout life, with the paths of the sexes never crossing.

Bateson seems accurate on most points; however his theory fails to account for within group behavior and does not account for the fact that Cajun men use a different language when talking with other men rather than with women. It also does not explain the comradery exhibited by Cajun women when together, whether in the kitchen or out shopping. I believe Bateson to be correct in accepting social influences on individual behavior and in seeing genetic influences as the basis for cultural structure.

There are two primary theories used to account for gender differences: sociobiological and sociocultural. The sociobiological view asserts that many gender characteristics, both morphological and

behavioral, are inherited, passed from one generation to the next through DNA. (Wilson, 1975, 1978; Barash, 1977) Sociobiologists view gender characteristics as evolutionarily adaptive, satisfying certain needs in the evolving human species. Sociobiologists view the temperamental and behavioral characteristics associated with each sex as integral to the concepts of masculinity and femininity, and as indispensable to individual fitness. Desmond Morris (1984), in *The Naked Ape*, said that the sociobiological approach draws its material from three main sources: (1) paleontological information based on the remains of our ancient ancestors; (2) information available from animal behavior studies by comparative ethologists, from detailed observations of animal species, particularly primates; and (3) ethnographic information from direct observation of man in many cultural settings. (1984: 11) From these sources, sociobiologists determine that we are the products of our ancestors' adaptations.

Most sociobiologists today reject the assumption of male superiority, but hold firmly to the assertion that men and women had essentially different roles to fulfill in man's evolutionary past. The male role has simply been culturally more prestigious than the female role (Nowak, 1990). There are examples of societies in which women have held high levels of power and prestige, and the women of these cultures were not unfeminine, based on the modern definition, but were simply seen as more capable, based on their feminine characteristics, of handling both domestic and public activities (Nowak, 1990). Sociobiologists view sexual dominance as a cultural phenomena, but see male and female roles as evolutionarily defined. These roles include

gender appropriate language. Sociobiologists view language as a manifestation of innate sex roles and little influenced by culture (Nowak, 1990).

In *Eve's Rib*, Nowak (1980) wrote that it was up to each individual to use and surpass what gifts evolution has bestowed. She stated that, while genetically different, the female was "at least as versatile and capable, as intelligent and competent, and as important as her male counterpart. (1980: 120)" Sociobiologists today accept that our genetic inheritance merely gives us a foundational structure. What is built upon this structure is shaped by the society in which each individual develops (Lumsden and Wilson, 1981).

Socioculturalists believe that what we are as individuals is a function of our cultural background. Evolution gives us only a complex body of physical characteristics, upon which society builds a superstructure containing the personality and cognitive features which make each person uniquely individual. According to this thesis, we are shaped by our environment, not by our genes. They reject the idea that there are uniquely masculine and feminine traits which control the actions of the individual. They focus on the shaping of each person by society. They include language as one of the shaped factors. Just as we learn specific languages depending upon geographic origin, we learn gender appropriate language as a function of enculturation.

Thompson (1903), in *The Mental Traits of Sex*, wrote that "the social atmosphere [of boys and girls] is different, from the cradle. (1903: 177)" She said this in refutation of the biological determinism that had flooded the scientific world after the acceptance of Darwinian theory.

During this period, Freudian ideas of maternal desires and penis envy were popular, and women were portrayed as an evolutionarily lesser form of man. Jung (1982), Horney (1967), and Harding (1970) were among the first to disagree with many of Freud's deterministic ideas. When Skinner began his work and the idea of reinforced learning was accepted, many of the earlier mentalistic ideas were rejected, allowing room for study and analysis on a more empirical level. Techniques for psychological measurement came into widespread use (Spence & Helmreich, 1978), and science began to view men and women as simply two forms of the same species, a view that had changed dramatically since the days when Freud wrote that the resolution of a girl's Oedipal desires could only occur if her masculine side were strong enough (Young-Bruehl, 1990).

Following Skinner came theorists like Rotter (1972) and Bandura (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1963), who created the cognitive social learning theory to account for the variety of mental and emotional behaviors available. Walter Mischel (1979), a social learning theorist, wrote, "*sex-typed behaviors* may be defined as behaviors that typically elicit different rewards for one sex than for the other. In other words, sex-typed behaviors have consequences that vary according to the sex of the performer... the acquisition and performance of sex-typed behaviors can be described by the same learning principles used to analyze any other aspect of an individual's behavior. (1979: 56)" Mischel said that observational learning plays an important role in sex-typing, wherein adult models serve to mold a child's perceptions of gender appropriate behavior. Other psychological researchers (Kohlberg, 1979; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963) have also supported this view. Social learning theory is consistent with the ideas of

the sociocultural theorists, who see cultural mores and habits as learned and passed on from one individual to another by means of communication and interaction. Cognitive social learning theorists created a field of study using empirical measures to study the cognitive functioning of individuals within a social framework. These theorists use biological and cultural data and have as theoretical foundations the principles of learning and memory (Wittig & Petersen, 1979). Patterns of discourse and their educational antecedents are examined. Family and social life is studied as integral to individual development, and psychology has come to fully appreciate the impact of a social existence on the individual (Belenky, et al, 1989).

Psychology and anthropology have both come to view man as a product of his environment as much as of his heredity. Neisser (1976, 1982), a prominent cognitive psychologist, has advocated the use of ethnographic cross-cultural study in examining the individual. He sees justification in looking at the effects of cultural institutions on the individual and writes as a cultural determinist. Neisser sees the individual as learning appropriate responses from his/her culture and believes that this enculturation serves to limit an individual's potential responses. He thinks that cross-cultural study is vital to discovering the true range of human potential.

In a review of the literature, the reader is struck by the absence of firm data on gender formation. Researchers understand the physiological construction of sex, but it is more difficult to pinpoint how a child is shaped into a gendered adult. Psychologists and anthropologists both accept the influence of heredity on the developing

child. The physical attributes provided to each of us at birth are a starting point for gender, and these physiological factors are easily observed and measured. Less easy to see are the subtle yet pervasive influences of society. Societal expectations and demands serve to define and reinforce gender appropriate behavior. This is seen cross-culturally in the many definitions of masculinity and femininity. Among the Cajuns, a man goes away and works, leaving his wife home to take care of children and religion. In the Japanese culture, a woman is expected to be quiet and subservient, yet highly capable and well educated. The Iatmul view effective and successful transvestism as a highly desirable trait in both sexes, given the right conditions. Because of the wide range of possible thought and behavior, humans as a whole vary at every point. The restricted communication skills of animals limit the rapid spread of ideas and concepts. Humans with their advanced methods of communication are highly capable of passing on information, and these ideas are shared by many individuals. So it is with sex roles. Culture, building on those biological facts evolution has left in our genes, shapes our concepts of masculinity and femininity, and with successful enculturation, these ideas affect every aspect of our lives, from overt action to cognition and emotion.

Language, perhaps more than other overt behaviors, reflects our beliefs about ourselves and those around us. The language of women, characterized as gentler, quieter, less aggressive, reflects the culturally reinforced idea that women should embody maternal virtues of gentleness and quiet. Men's language is more aggressive and more competitive, used more for achievement than for conciliation. This

reflects the culturally reinforced picture of men as bread-winners, as hunters who go out and provide for the family. Tannen (1990) agrees with other theorists (Lakoff 1975; Key, 1972, 1975; Kramar, 1977; Kramarae, 1981; McConnell-Ginet, et al, 1980; Newcombe & Arnkoff, 1979; Quina, et al, 1987; Smith, 1985; Thorne, et al, 1983; Spender, 1985) when she writes that a man engages the world "as an individual in a hierarchical social order in which he is either one-up or one-down (1990: 24)," while a woman approaches the world "as an individual in a network of connections. (1990: 25)" While Tannen's book is an overestimate of the present linguistic division between the sexes, she makes a valid point. She rightly says that men and women use language for different reasons, and those reasons are revealed in the style and content of the language.

My thesis came from this idea. I believe that men use more action words in communication, simply because their culturally acquired mental framework has prepared them to be more action-oriented in language. (Note that I did not say more active.) Men are more likely to construct a direct plan of action to solve problems than are women. I believe this phenomenon is intensified when in group situations, especially with members of the opposite sex.

Much research has been done on this topic (Edelsky, 1976a, 1976b; Key, 1972; Kramar, 1977; Mulac, et al, 1988, 1985). The results have been contradictory and confusing. Some researchers have found significant differences. Ethnographically, there is much evidence for gender diversified speech (Shibamoto, 1987; Ochs, 1987; Bell, 1990; Hill, 1987; Jabbra, 1980; Kuipers, 1986; Thorlindson, 1987; Warner, 1989).

Warner wrote that a Chinese anthropologist had discovered a language previously unknown. She wrote, "...the women had kept the language alive while weaving, and songs and poems and fragments of autobiography survive... (1989: 31)" Shibamoto (1987) defined and compared frequencies of feminine speech among the Japanese, and found it to be situational, depending on group and stereotypical behavior. Ochs (1987) credited documented linguistic differences to stratification in Samoan society, and Kuipers (1986) found that men's speech was more direct and narrative than was women's among an Indonesian society. Sherzer (1987) argued that "gender distinctions in language must be seen in the context of sociological differentiation and cultural framing of which they constitute an integral aspect - they are both a reflection of and a contributor to this sociological differentiation and cultural framing. (1987: 119)" He went on to provide evidence of linguistic differences between genders among a group of Panamanian Indians.

Other researchers have not found strong evidence of gender differences in language (Weir, et al, 1987; Brabandt and Mooney, 1989; Mulac, et al, 1985, 1988; Quina, 1987). Mulac, et al (1985, 1988) have reported interesting results. Their results indicate a bias based on social status, rather than based on gender roles and concepts. Their research has identified linguistic features, such as interruption rate, that are associated with social status. Mulac, et al see this as an operative variable in gender relations. Men and women in conversation behave toward each other much as do business associates of unequal status, with the man using language characteristic of the higher status individual. Quina (1987) has also obtained results that are worthy of

consideration. She found stereotyped characteristics in women's speech, but not in men's. The female characteristics include more adjective use and more use of the passive voice.

Jeske and Overman (1984) wrote, in a modification of Lakoff's thesis, that women's language was the official social language, and that men may be "bilingual," or more linguistically flexible and adaptable. Jeske and Overman thought that if we stopped viewing women's language as inferior then we would have more success in finding evidence of it. Ellen Goodman (1990) wrote a commentary that asked why women felt obliged to change their speech in mixed company. Goodman provided no data for this, but felt strongly that women simply had difficulty in using a "public voice." Many researchers have come to the conclusion that if men and women do have different languages, it is because of a sexist power structure and not because of any innate differences.

Much evidence for gender distinctive language is anecdotal. In the next section, I present the results of my search for empirical data to support the claims of gender diversity in language. Later, I discuss my results and the ways in which they relate to earlier research and theory.

Research at Three Undergraduate Institutions

Phase I

Method

Phase I of my research involved 301 subjects, 135 male and 166 female. These subjects were undergraduate students at Sweet Briar College (SBC), Hampden-Sydney College (H-SC), and Lynchburg College (LC), all small liberal arts schools in Central Virginia. Sweet Briar is a women's college, Hampden-Sydney is a men's college, and Lynchburg is co-educational. (For detailed descriptions of these institutions, please see Appendix A.) The 301 subjects included 41 women from SBC, 125 women from LC, 91 men from H-SC, and 44 men from LC. Each subject was asked to write answers to three questions, randomly selected by the experimenter from a pool of six questions. The six questions were: "How do you plan to achieve academic success;" "How will you find a place to live after graduation;" "How will you go about having a successful career;" "What are ways you see to make new friends;" "How would you go about buying a new car;" "What do you see as a way to obtain personal happiness?" These open-ended questions were based on questions used in similar studies in the literature (Mulac, 1988; Quina, 1987) and were designed to elicit a variety of written responses from the participants. These responses were scored on their content. The experimenter calculated the total number of action words used by each subject in each response. Words were only classified as "action" words and included in the score if they implied direct physical action, excluding such words as "think" and "have." Words were scored if written in past, present, or

future tense, but were not included if written in the passive voice.

Results

Means were calculated for the scores from Phase I, and *t*-tests were used to compare the following sets of means: total male versus female, male versus female for each of the individual questions, and H-SC men versus SBC women and LC men versus LC women. These results are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. *t*-tests were also done to compare the mean scores of H-SC men versus LC men and SBC women versus LC women. These results appear in Table 4.

Table 1
Overall Mean Action Word Scores for Males and Females

sex	n	X	<i>t</i>	p
male	135	9.593		
female	166	8.958		
			.986	>.1

Table 2
Overall Mean Action Word Scores for Males and Females
as a Function of Institution

school and sex	n	X	t	p
LC male	44	10.045		
LC female	125	8.528		
			1.628	<.1
H-SC male	91	9.374		
SBC female	41	10.268		
			.792	>.1

Table 3
Overall Mean Action Word Scores for Males and Females
as a Function of Question

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
male:						
n	63	66	68	70	66	72
X	3.254	3.348	5.147	3.357	2.348	1.792
female:						
n	86	84	82	82	85	79
X	2.942	2.619	4.585	3.354	2.541	1.861
t	.741	1.568	1.322	.008	.526	.219
p	>.1	>.1	>.1	>.1	>.1	>.1

Table 4
Overall Mean Action Word Scores for Males as a Function of Institution
and for Females as a Function of Institution

school and sex	n	X	t	p
LC male	44	10.045		
H-SC male	91	9.374		
			.655	>.1
LC female	125	8.528		
SBC female	41	10.268		
			1.709	<.05

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, the comparisons between the mean action word scores were not statistically significant at the $p < .1$ level, except for that of the LC men versus LC women. Table 3 indicates that the mean scores were not significantly different when sub-divided by the question asked. Table 4 shows that the scores of LC women differ significantly from those of SBC women, but the institutional setting had no statistically significant effect on men.

Phase II

Method

In Phase II, eighteen pairs of undergraduate individuals participated: six male with male (all from H-SC), six female with female (all from SBC), and six male with female (all from LC). Each pair of

subjects was given one of three open-ended questions to solve together. These questions were based on situations found in similar studies in the literature (Mulac, 1988; Quina, 1987). The three situations were: "Outline how you would work together to find and furnish your new apartment;" "Plan a realistic budget for the first three months in your new apartment, and outline how you would implement this plan;" "A baby is left at your door step. Outline how would care for this child." The subjects were told that they were sharing an apartment and that they were to work together to share the responsibilities. Each dyad was allowed no more than ten minutes to provide a response. They were asked to be clear and concise in their division of responsibility. The dialogues of the pairs were audio-recorded and were later analysed on the basis of the same criteria used in Phase I. Each participant was scored individually.

Results

Tables 5-8 present mean action word scores and *t*-test comparisons for the Phase II data. The scores were compared using the same analytic criteria as Phase I.

Table 5
Overall Mean Action Word Scores for Males and Females

sex	n	X	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
male	18	46.722		
female	18	35.611		
			2.269	<.025

Table 6
Overall Mean Action Word Scores for Males and Females
as a Function of Institution

school and sex	n	X	t	p
LC male	6	45.167		
LC female	6	37.167		
			.844	>.1
H-SC male	12	47.500		
SBC female	12	34.833		
			2.143	<.025

Table 7
Overall Mean Action Word Scores for Males and Females
as a Function of Question

	Q1	Q2	Q3
male:			
n	6	6	6
X	51.000	47.000	47.167
female:			
n	6	6	6
X	43.167	27.333	36.333
t	.961	2.449	1.046
p	>.1	<.025	>.1

Table 8
Overall Mean Action Word Scores for Males as a Function of Institution
and for Females as a Function of Institution

school and sex	n	X	t	p
LC male	6	45.167		
H-SC male	12	47.500		
			.298	>.1
LC female	6	37.167		
SBC female	12	34.833		
			.321	>.1

These results indicate that some of the Phase II data comparisons are statistically significant, particularly when looking at men versus women in general, and at men and women from single-sex institutions. In comparing answers to individual questions, only the second question, that regarding the budget plan, produced significant differences when comparing means of the sexes. Institutional differences are not found when comparing same sexes from different institutions. Interestingly, men and women from the single-sex institutions were significantly different in number of action words used, while those from the co-educational school were not.

Discussion

The data from Phase I and Phase II of this study revealed the

presence of gender specific language, defined here as frequency of action word use, only in group situations. Phase I, which dealt with subjects on an individual level, failed to show any statistical significance for the postulated phenomenon. Phase II, conducted in a group setting, revealed a significant difference in number of action words used by each sex. I now believe that this was to be expected. Most if not all of the evidence for gender differentiated language has been obtained in group situations, often from ethnographic data. Individual studies that rely on standard psychological methodology have consistently failed to provide any supporting data. I propose that linguistic differences between the sexes are a social phenomenon, an idea which fits in well with the ideas of the social learning theorists who saw language as socially formed. I now believe that it is unreasonable to expect conclusive data from individual tests, since language itself is largely a social behavior. Not only do we learn language socially, we practice it almost exclusively in social contexts. Earlier studies have failed to take into account the cultural framework of language and have been unsuccessful in providing significant data supporting the presence of gender specific language.

Further research should be conducted using groups of subjects. I believe that the best method to discover the range and structural limits of gender diverse language is to observe pairs and groups in natural social settings. The researcher could easily manipulate such variables as age, race, and gender mixture of the group involved. There is also a need to study differences in educational settings, such as those found in this study regarding single-sex versus co-educational settings. This research revealed that men and women from single-sex schools more closely fit the hypothesized pattern than did co-educated students. Such an idea is

significant for planning of educational programs and for the future of single-sex institutions.

By simply observing and recording people as they go through daily interaction, a researcher would be able to more tightly define and hypothesize about gender differences in language use. Social and cognitive psychology has been trying such methods for many years, and anthropology has always used them. It is time to tie the two disciplines together, using the data gathering techniques of psychology and the ethnographic understanding of anthropology. In this union, we may find the answers and evidence we seek about gender and language.

Conclusions

The data obtained in this study supported only part of my original hypothesis and enabled me to see the essential error in my Phase I design. Other researchers have made similar mistakes, and some have come to the same conclusions as I. While used and shaped by the individual, language continues to be a social creation. Each society establishes rules for language use, and each individual learns these rules through enculturation. Genes provide the physical mechanisms for communication, but society dictates how those mechanisms will be used. Both my literary and experimental research has led me this conclusion.

By combining the fields of psychology and anthropology, fields that have diverse methods and goals, I have provided evidence of a phenomenon that previously had little data to support it. This research could not have been successful without input from both disciplines. Language is far too complex to be studied in only one discipline. To try to do so is to fail at the goal of science, which is to try to provide a parsimonious explanation. I can now say simply that gender differences in language exist as a function of culture and of individual experience. Society assigns specific roles to each gender. One appropriate sex role behavior is language, and when an individual learns his/her role, he/she internalizes the appropriate language. These roles are more often displayed in social situations than in individual settings.

Further exploration in this area is crucial. We have yet to detail the specifics of gender diverse language, and we have yet to fully appreciate what impact these differences may have on individuals. There

is little to support the idea that these differences have a profound effect on the average person, but the pervasiveness of gender distinct language surely affects not only actions but attitudes as well.

Sherzer (1987) wrote that he supported ethnographic study of gender diverse language because it allowed appreciation of the fact that in not every culture was women's language "socially and culturally inferior, domestic, or polite. (1987: 120)" This reflects how I believe these differences should be approached. My research, and that of others mentioned throughout, has supported the cross-cultural presence of gender diverse language. If we can appreciate the language of both genders and see it for the social construction that it is, we use both forms to help men and women communicate more effectively. Both the conciliatory patterns of women's speech and the strength of men's speech can be employed for more successful communication. Just as the fields of psychology and anthropology had to join and communicate to make possible this research, so too must the diverse languages of men and women be used to make possible clearer communication and understanding between the sexes and between all individuals.

Appendix

Descriptions of Institutions Used in Phases I and II

Sweet Briar College is a women's college, founded in 1901, and located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Central Virginia. It has approximately 600 students, and offers the B.A. and B.S. degrees. Hampden-Sydney College is a men's college, founded in the late eighteenth century. It is located in Central Virginia, and has approximately 1100 students. It too offers undergraduate arts and sciences degrees. Lynchburg College is located in Lynchburg, Virginia, and has about 2000 undergraduate and 500 graduate students.

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